

# Riding the Wild Seal River

*A whitewater novice canoes the Seal River through Canadian Shield and raw tundra. En route, from the tiny northern Manitoba community of Tadoule Lake to Hudson Bay, she encounters 42 sets of rapids, from highly intimidating to terrifying.*

BY JUDY WAYTIUK

The haystack wave towered a metre above the spray-skirted red Royalex canoe's bow where I kneeled, a terrified whitewater novice. Clutching the paddle, I gaped at the roaring wall of water and went into brain stall. Rob Currie, whitewater guide and sternman, bellowed, "Paddle, Judy! Forward!" I obeyed. The canoe lurched ahead, drenching me and filling my spray-skirt girdle with gallons of northern Manitoba's wild, icy Seal River.

We bucked and bounced down another half-kilometer of one of Mother Nature's more extravagant water tantrums before eddying out into a quiet spot at the bottom of the

unnamed rapids marking the transition from Negassa Lake to Shetanei Lake. Sputtering, I heaved the spray-skirt up to spill out the water it had collected, and heard Rob hoot, "A deer in headlights! Swear-to-gawd, you looked scared as a deer caught in headlights!"

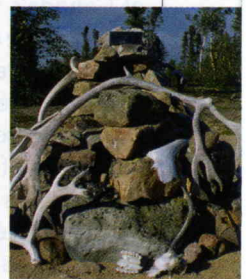
In the second canoe, guffaws rolled out from Mark Loewen, our

second guide, and Eric Lindberg, an American writer-photographer. It was the best fun I'd had in years, and I wanted more. I got plenty more.

That evening, we set up our first camp of ten nights on the river. We hauled food and gear packs to the top of a wide, flat esker. There, a reverently arranged pile of rocks and caribou antlers is topped by a small brass plaque saluting Bill Mason, Canada's premiere canoeist. The plaque reads simply: His Spirit Will Come Through. Mason never got here. He

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**Forty-two sets of rapids rate the Seal River as 'high volume' to seasoned paddlers.**



Photos: Judy Waytiuk



